

ISAN

MAGAZINE

FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

June 2025

PGS Special Edition



About ISAN Magazine

ISAN Magazine was born in 2021 out of the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa, a project funded by BMZ and operationalised by GIZ and African NGOs through five knowledge hubs making up the Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Africa. The aim is to support the emergence of a strong regional

network, to capacitate multipliers of farming knowledge and to fill knowledge gaps that hinder the uptake of organic agroecology.

ISAN magazine actively works to continue strengthening networks, keeping practitioners and consumers informed and advocating for organic agroecology.

ISAN Magazine is dedicated to building a strong network of informed civil society actors and organisations across the southern African region to advocate for organic agriculture and agroecology as a framework for regional food and farming systems.

Editor-in-chief: **Fortunate Nyakanda**

Managing Editor: **Stefanie Swanepoel**

Staff writers: **Odette Mavunga, Rabbecca Mwila & Isaac Mafuel**

Production: **Odette Mavunga**

Layout & design: **Alister Makan'a**

Published by: **Mycelium Media Colab**

Get in touch if you want to feature your organisation, event, festival or projects through one of our special editions. **Email us** for more information.

Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). Subscribe to get your free copy by registering [here](#).

Front cover: PGS SA farm assessment visit, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

Credit: SAOSO

Our partners



Contents

Welcome note	1	PGS Key activities	15
About SAOSO & PGS SA	3	• Conducting farm assessments • Certification and seals • Establishing PGS markets	
About PGS	4	PGS: A growing movement	22
How does PGS work?	8	Showcase: uBumi PGS, Zambia	23
• Phase 1: Laying the foundation for a PGS • Phase 2: Strengthening farmer organisations • Phase 3: preparing for market access • Phase 4: Establishing a PGS		Showcase: NOA PGS, Namibia	27

Welcome note



Managing Editor: **ISAN Magazine**
Communications Manager:
**Knowledge Hub for Organic
Agriculture and Agroecology in
Southern Africa**

Welcome to this special edition of ISAN Magazine, focused on Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) with contributions from the South African Organic Sector Organisation and PGS South Africa, based on their groundbreaking national PGS training programme run between 2021 and 2024 under the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa and showcasing Ubumi PGS in Zambia and the Namibian Organic Association's PGS in Namibia.

PGS is a proven approach for building trust and sharing knowledge across the food system—from farmers and consumers to processors and retailers. It strengthens local food networks and gives small-scale farmers collective bargaining power and greater influence in shaping sustainable, fair food systems.

Inside this edition, you'll find practical guidance on how to set up and run a PGS, alongside case studies, farmer testimonials and downloadable resources. We welcome you to share with us stories of PGS in your country so that we can support the emergence of a strong farmer-led certification system in Africa.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a small amount of dark brown soil. The person is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. The background is a blurred garden with green plants and a wooden fence. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent orange rectangle in the center of the image.

“PGS is not just about becoming a different version of third-party certification – it is a social process and a labour of love. Without a love for the soil and love for your neighbour, it will not flourish.”

Konrad Hauptfleisch
Former Head of Capacity Development
IFOAM-Organics International

About SAOSO & PGS SA



www.pgssa.org.za



The SAOSO Foundation envisions a future where South Africa thrives on resilient, eco-friendly food systems rooted in biodiversity and sustainability. Its mission is to drive the transition to agroecological and organic farming through training, research, standards development, advocacy and market access. As a division of the Foundation, Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS SA) serves as the operational arm of SAOSO, supporting grassroots networks to help smallholder farmers access markets, connect with consumers and gain recognition for sustainable practices.

About the PGS Pollinator Programme

Between 2021 and 2024, the PGS Pollinator Programme successfully equipped 19 Pollinators with the skills to establish and support **18 PGS** groups across seven provinces in South Africa. This pioneering effort brought **501 farmers into organic certification** processes, conducted **175 farm visits**, and certified 137 farms as organic or in conversion. The programme improved **market access for 16 groups** and boosted the supply of organic produce in South Africa. With a strong focus on practical training, mentorship and knowledge sharing, the initiative produced **51 knowledge products**, launched a **national PGS map**, and connected farmer groups to wider networks—laying the foundation for a more inclusive and sustainable food system in South Africa.

Levers for PGS success

While PGS can be established without a national organic movement, having **nationally recognised organic standards and coordination** strengthens consistency and credibility across groups. Strong PGS groups rely on **shared leadership**. While Pollinators may initiate the process, leadership should gradually shift to the members to build group ownership and resilience. **Not all farmers need to be certified immediately**—tiered membership structures allow those still learning to stay engaged and grow into readiness, while ensuring that assessments and certification are meaningful and manageable. Long-term sustainability depends on **building local partnerships** from the outset, including with local governments, schools and other key community actors. Establishing strong PGS groups takes **time**.



PGS farm assessment visit, Limpopo South Africa
Credit: PGS SA

About PGS

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) are second-party organic certification systems that are more appropriate and affordable for small-scale farmers.

PGS is a clear and farmer-focused way to show consumers that organic products are trustworthy. It helps farmers connect with each other, share knowledge and build a supportive community. At the same time, it helps consumers learn more about making ethical choices that support local farmers and the local economy. PGS groups strengthen local food systems by putting farmers at the centre and encouraging community involvement, openness and trust. They play an important role in building strong local food networks and encouraging cooperation between everyone involved in the regional food supply.

Uptake of PGS to support farmers in collective action and in accessing organic and agroecological markets is growing fast, particularly in the countries of the Global South.

Participatory Guarantee Systems

Local organic certification for farmers and consumers



PGS | SOUTH AFRICA

6 ELEMENTS — 10 FEATURES



1 GRASSROOTS
organisation



3 FARMERS
pledges



2 PRINCIPLES AND VALUES
that enhance livelihoods



4 NORMS conceived
by all the stakeholders

5 Clear, pre-defined CONSEQUENCES
for non-compliance



6 DOCUMENTED management
systems and procedures

7 Mechanisms to VERIFY
compliance



8 Suitable to SMALLHOLDER
AGRICULTURE



9 Mechanisms to SUPPORT
farmers

10 Seals/labels as evidence of
ORGANIC STATUS



Learn more at www.pgssa.org.za

[Download poster](#)



**“Cultural diversity, seed exchanges,
and horizontally-structured groups
are adaptable, dynamic and
accountable. They are living
organisms and the six basic elements
and the 10 key features are the glue
that holds a PGS group together.”**

Audrey Wainwright
PGS Facilitator, Mentor & Trainer

Farmer story: Maxabandile Mlauli, **MOUNT FRERE PGS**

I've found my life's passion in organic farming, agroecology, regenerative agriculture and permaculture. These aren't just farming methods—they're tools for healing. As we restore the land, we begin to heal ourselves. I believe many of today's societal issues stem from our deep disconnection from nature.

Becoming a PGS Pollinator gave me more than technical skills—it gave me purpose. It connected me to a growing network of small-scale organic farmers across the country and inspired me to co-found a women- and youth-led cooperative rooted in the values I learned during the training: community, sustainability and collective growth. Our co-op is self-funded and committed to eradicating poverty, creating employment and addressing malnutrition in our small town. Water scarcity has been our biggest challenge—we rely on rainwater, which limits our yields in winter. We're planning to build a dam and hope to one day sink a borehole to support future growth. Through PGS and SAOSO, we aim to unify farmer co-ops and household growers to build a resilient, locally rooted food system. Our vision includes organic input production, a local market, school training programmes and a media and learning hub for farmers.

This is about more than farming. It's about sovereignty, dignity and reconnecting with the Earth—and with each other.



Farm: Sinako Sisonke Permaculture Co-operative, South Africa

- **Location:** Mount Frere, Eastern Cape
- **PGS Group:** Mount Frere PGS
- **Hectares under production:** 2 hectares
- **Years farming organically:** 4 years
- **Crops:** Cabbages, potatoes, spinach, beetroot, carrot, lettuce, tomatoes and spring onions
- **Jobs created:** 5 permanent and 2 seasonal
- **Markets:** Local schools, hawkers, restaurants, catering companies and consumers in the community

How does PGS work?



*PGS farmers market, Eastern Cape South Africa
Credit: PGS SA*

The journey starts when a group of organic farmers has extra produce to sell and decides to form a PGS to enter the market together. This allows them to work together to check that each other's farms meet the group-agreed standards.

PGS members can include local farmers, shoppers, food processors and even retailers. It's a strong system that helps people share what they know and a proven way to make local food systems stronger.



PGS | SOUTH AFRICA
Local organic certification for farmers and consumers



Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)
ensure the organic certification
of our food through the participation
of farmers and consumers.

How it works



[Download poster](#)

Phase 1: Laying the foundation for a PGS

The first phase is about bringing farmers together to form the foundation of your PGS group. This includes those already farming without chemicals as well as those interested in moving away from conventional methods towards organic production.

The aim is to build trust, deepen understanding of organic agroecological practices and form a strong community of practice.

Start by engaging regularly with interested farmers to encourage learning and commitment to organic production. Work together to form a farmer-led group, which will provide structure and support for the group going forward. This phase is informal and focuses on building relationships and sharing knowledge.

You should also:

- Connect with national organisations such as the organic standard holder, PGS convenor and any relevant farmer networks or local training centres.
- Hold an introductory meeting with farmers and other local food system stakeholders to explain the PGS approach.
- Launch a local community of practice that meets regularly to support learning and collaboration.
- Identify farmer champions who can help lead and inspire others in the group.

Each participating farmer should sign a simple pledge to show their commitment to organic agroecological farming and to staying active in the community of practice.



PGS meeting, Eastern Cape South Africa
Credit: PGS SA

Phase 2: Strengthening farmer organisations

In this phase, farmer organisations become more structured and begin building partnerships to improve resources and support, particularly through engagement with local government.

Farmers identify shared needs and goals, explore partnerships, engage local government for potential support and formally establish the group as a voluntary association or a cooperative. The name of the formal group should preferably link to a local geography or landmark.

Membership fees (determined by the group) can be introduced to cover basic operational costs of the formal group. And a constitution can be drawn up to govern how the group will operate.

This all serves to establish the farmer group as a collective actor when engaging in partnerships and enables the group to receive government, donor and other support and funding.

Intercontinental Network of Organic Farmer Organisations (INOFO)

Reach out to the representative in your country/region of the [INOFO](#) for advice on formalising the group. In Southern Africa, the representative is [Busisiwe Mgangxela](#). INOFO is a global network that links farmer groups to international platforms, advocating for their rights and needs. By drawing on the skills, knowledge and networks of farmers worldwide, it helps shape strategies that support long-term food security.

Phase 3: Preparing for market access

Now that farmers are organised, the focus shifts to coordinating production for those ready to supply local markets. This includes aligning planting schedules and planning for consistent, reliable supply. Farmer organisations may also begin linking with others at district or regional level.

Farmers not yet ready to sell can stay involved and continue learning. Key outcomes of this phase include regular production and that willing farmers complete a basic organic self-assessment form to determine their readiness for PGS certification.

At this point, farmers in the group have mapped their farm, undertaken some form of production and planning management, are tracking their inputs and outputs and have a plan to manage soil fertility, pests and diseases.

Farmers continue to meet regularly to exchange knowledge and learnings. Completion of the basic self-assessment form helps them to prepare for more formal PGS processes. All farmers should be aware of and understand the relevant organic production principles.

GROWING THE ORGANIC SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA



**Basic
Production
Principles**



[Download
booklet](#)

**The Principle
Of Health.**

**The Principle
Of Ecology.**

**The Principle
Of Fairness.**

**The Principle
Of Care.**

Phase 4: Establishing a PGS

With organic production in place and market demand confirmed, the farmer organisation can now form a PGS group for market-ready members.

Key steps to establishing a PGS

- Hold a founding AGM to establish the PGS group (see notes about membership below), adopt an organic standard and standard operating procedures, and have members sign a pledge.
- Name the group as an extension of the farmer organisation (e.g. [Farmer Org Name] PGS).
- Elect a PGS committee (can be the same as the farmer organisation).
- Register with the national PGS body (if one is in place) and pay membership fees for access to the seal and support.
- Set a schedule for farm assessments and begin certifying farms.
- Identify or develop market outlets, either independently or through an aggregation hub.
- Engage local government, stakeholders and consumers to build support.



Ocean View Organic Farmers, Klein Slangkop PGS, Western Cape, South Africa Credit: Your Stories, Sharing our narrative

Membership of a PGS: A PGS group has a diverse membership drawing in people from across the local food system. Membership of a PGS group comprises farmers (a minimum of 3 farmers), local consumers, processors and retailers. This diversity supports transparency in local food systems and encourages knowledge sharing among farmers and between farmers and their customers. Members pay an annual fee, which is set by each PGS group, and must attend a minimum number of farm assessment visits each year. This participatory certification method strengthens the local food chain and is a powerful advocacy tool to raise awareness with consumers and stakeholders, such as local government.

Farmer story: Angelo Marman, **SWARTLAND PGS**

Farming isn't easy—especially on a small scale. Input and labour costs keep rising, and water and electricity are constant concerns. Our daily delivery routes stretch up to 300 km, and unpredictable weather can ruin a harvest overnight. But I still believe in organic farming.

It brings health consciousness and mindful eating to the fore. More and more people want to eat well, and organic produce not only meets that need—it offers slightly better margins, which makes a real difference. I've never taken profit from the farm. Instead, every cent goes back in to grow the business and strengthen our impact.

Our biggest success is investing in people—both our team and our community.

We're now converting an old chicken coop into a processing hub where local farmers can bring fresh vegetables. From chilli sauces to garlic and ginger mixes, all packed in biodegradable packaging, it will open new markets and reduce waste. We'll also run a soup kitchen and create learning spaces for children.

Organic farming is about more than crops. It's about feeding our communities, creating jobs and building something lasting. For me, it's a way to bring dignity back to the land—and hope to the people who depend on it.



Farm: Abitzfarming, South Africa

- **Location:** Riverlands outside Malmesbury, Western Cape
- **PGS Group:** Swartland PGS
- **Hectares under production:** 3.5 hectares
- **Years farming organically:** 4 years
- **Crops:** Carrots, cabbage, cauliflower, rosemary, celery, parsley, onions, potatoes & rocket. Seasonal crops: Sweet potatoes, pumpkin, peppers, tomatoes & cucumbers
- **Jobs created:** 4 permanent and 20 seasonal, and 3 internships
- **Markets:** Oranjezicht City Farm, Metro Organics, Happy Hounds, Wild Organics, Wild Sprouts

PGS: Key activities



PGS farm assessment visit, Western Cape, South Africa Credit: Stefanie Swanepoel

Each PGS group undertakes certain activities throughout the year. These include:

- Conducting annual farm assessments of each PGS member.
- Providing feedback on the assessment to the farmer, either providing certification approval or areas that need to be remedied before certification can be provided.
- Conducting follow-up visits.
- Keeping records of all farm assessments, and submitting these to the national PGS authority, if one is in place.
- Finding markets for PGS produce or creating them.
- Managing financial and administration oversight of member fees and assessment schedules and outcomes.
- Holding an annual general meeting with all members.

PGS Activity: Conducting farm assessments

There are several key steps to a farm assessment.

- **Pre-assessment preparation**

Farmers are given a questionnaire that they complete before the farm visit. The assessment team has a chance to review this before the visit. If it is a new farmer and it seems from the questionnaire that they might not be ready for certification assessment, an informal visit can be held and the farmer encouraged to join other assessments in preparation for their own.

- **Scheduling and invitations**

Allow a minimum of three hours for the visit. Invite at least three experienced peer farmers and, where possible, include local buyers, consumers or members from other PGS groups. Share the farmer's questionnaire and the PGS standard operating procedures at least three days in advance so participants can prepare.

- **What to bring**

Take the completed questionnaire, previous reports (if any), checklists for all attendees, standard operating procedures, the organic standard, attendance register, pens and any supporting documents like maps or test results.

- **On-farm assessment**

Begin with introductions and explain the PGS process. Hand out checklists and walk through the farm, covering soil health, composting, planting, biodiversity, seed use, water, pest management, animal welfare and record-keeping. Encourage questions and take notes.

- **Decision-making**

After the walk, gather participants to review findings. Identify any missing documents or corrective actions. Agree on a decision: certify, approve as organic-in-conversion or reschedule. Note any notifiable exceptions (e.g. non-organic seed use) and ensure they are reported.

- **Final steps and follow-up**

Thank participants and share that a draft report will be circulated within two weeks. Finalise the report with any comments, confirm the decision and update group records. Upload files and share with your PGS committee or national PGS body (if in place) as needed.

- **If not ready**

If the farm isn't ready for certification, send a written recommendation to reschedule, with reasons and support options.

- **Keep good records**

Update the farm assessment log with outcomes, corrective actions and participation info. This helps maintain transparency and supports ongoing learning within your PGS group.

Knowledge sharing & exchange

Farm assessment visits are about more than certification; they provide ideal spaces for the exchange of knowledge and relationship building. Care must be taken to avoid them becoming mechanistic and solely focused on a checklist.

GROWING THE ORGANIC SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA



**Farm Visit
 Guide**

[Download
 booklet](#)

Farmer story: Butshabelo Mabunda, **GIYANI PGS**

My main crop is organic sweet potatoes that I sell mainly to the local community. They are so popular that people have stopped buying their sweet potatoes from the well-known retailers, but they rather stop at my farm and get directly from me.

Organic farming is my passion, and I am busy with my farm every day. I never experience hiccups or challenges because every day I am trying new things, and I am focused on my crops.

Our PGS group is ever expanding and covers a very large area including hundreds of new organic farmers joining us from Venda. My biggest success is that because I am so passionate about farming naturally, wherever I go, I meet new people and communicate with them about organic agroecological practices, and they believe in me and my stories. Then they start following me, mainly the local community and begin to practice what I tell them. I even speak to conventional farmers that are interested in transitioning to organic.

My vision is to turn my farm into a demonstration site where people can come and see how things work. I want to continue with my agriculture and also introduce free-range poultry and aquaculture to create a full cycle where the crops feed the chickens, the chicken manure feeds the fish and then that nutrient-rich water feeds the crops.



Farm: Sheba Organics, South Africa

- **Location:** Giyani, north-eastern Limpopo province
- **PGS Group:** Giyani PGS trading as Limpopo PGS
- **Hectares under production:** 1 hectare, expanding to 6 hectares
- **Years farming organically:** 9 years
- **Crops:** Sweet potatoes, okra, indigenous pumpkins, maize and tomatoes
- **Jobs created:** 1 permanent and 3 seasonal
- **Market:** Mainly the local community

PGS Activity: Certification & seals



The seals are an important part of certification; farmers and PGS groups use them to provide assurance of sustainable production methods, and they serve as marketing and advocacy tools.

It is important to raise awareness with local consumers and retailers as to what PGS is, how it works and what assurance it provides. Having local consumers and food system actors, such as local government and retailers, involved in farm assessment visits helps significantly with this.



Different PGS systems around the world have slightly different certification options. In South Africa, there are two options: PGS certified organic and PGS certified in-conversion. PGS groups are custodians of the manner in which the seals are used in their PGS groups.

The in-conversion seal is used when farmers who cannot support/attest to the organic history of the land or who are converting from chemical to organic agriculture.

PGS Activity: Establishing PGS markets



Farmers' markets stand apart from commercial retail spaces because of their community-centred character and support for local food systems.

They are typically pedestrian-friendly, easily accessible and foster direct relationships between producers and consumers. Featuring a diverse mix of traders and locally grown produce, they celebrate regional flavour and agricultural knowledge.

For markets to thrive, they must be well-stocked, consistently scheduled and well-attended.

Importantly, PGS are increasingly playing a role in these markets by offering trusted, low-cost organic certification. This builds consumer confidence and enables smallholder farmers to sell their produce as certified organic, further strengthening the integrity and sustainability of local food economies.

GROWING THE ORGANIC SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA



How to set up a Farmers' Market

A guide for South
African PGS groups
to establish and host
Farmers' Markets

[Download
booklet](#)

PGS: A growing movement

PGS is gaining ground as a preferred certification system for sustainable farming practices. It can be found in many African countries, Latin America and India, among other regions. There are many reasons why!

- **It is affordable and accessible**

Traditional third-party certification is often too expensive and bureaucratic for smallholders. PGS, by contrast, is low-cost and designed to be accessible to farmers with limited resources. It reduces barriers to entry for organic/agroecological markets.

- **It is locally rooted and context-appropriate**

PGS is built around local knowledge, farming practices and community values. Standards and procedures are adapted to suit the ecological, cultural and economic realities of a particular region, which makes it more relevant and sustainable in the long term.

- **A community-based trust system**

Instead of relying on external auditors, PGS relies on mutual trust, peer reviews and transparency. Farmers inspect each other's farms, which builds accountability and shared learning. This system strengthens relationships within farming communities.

- **Supports farmer empowerment**

Because farmers are involved in setting standards, conducting assessments and decision-making, PGS promotes farmer ownership and empowerment. It shifts certification from a top-down process to a participatory, democratic one.

- **It encourages learning and improvement**

PGS is not just a policing mechanism; it's a tool for learning. Farm visits include knowledge sharing, problem-solving and peer support, helping farmers improve their practices over time.

- **It is recognised and growing worldwide**

While PGS is primarily for local and direct markets, it is increasingly recognised by governments, networks like IFOAM Organics International and consumer groups. Its credibility continues to grow as more countries adopt enabling policies.

- **It supports market access**

PGS certification helps smallholders access local and informal organic markets by offering credible, community-verified assurance to consumers without the costs and complexity of formal certification.

PGS works because it's people-centred, practical and grounded in local realities — all while upholding the core values of organic farming.

Get in touch with PGS SA for more information on setting up PGS national bodies or groups.

Read on to find out about a relatively new PGS movement started in Zambia and the established PGS system in Namibia.

uBumi PGS, Zambia

A Growing Movement for Food Sovereignty in Zambia

In January 2022, a small but passionate group of 11 organic farmers, producers and consumers gathered in Lusaka to establish the uBumi PGS, With support from PGS South Africa, Greens & Grains Trading Ltd., and the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa.

This grassroots initiative was born out of a shared vision: to strengthen Zambia's organic sector through a community-driven and accessible quality assurance system. True to its name, uBumi—meaning “health” in many Zambian dialects—captures the group's mission to foster trust, share knowledge and promote a healthier future for farmers and consumers.



uBumi PGS provides an alternative to third-party certification by empowering small-scale farmers, celebrating local foods, and building sustainable connections between growers and communities.

At the heart of uBumi's work is a rigorous yet inclusive certification process that balances accountability with collaboration.



Members of uBumi PGS, Zambia
Credit: uBumi PGS

Farmers must pass annual inspections, sign the Farmer's Pledge, and observe at least three inspections before their own. Training is essential, with all members required to attend or host organic and PGS sessions before certification.

Regular engagement through monthly 'Green Gatherings' hosted by Greens & Grains and quarterly governance meetings ensures that uBumi members remain active participants in shaping the PGS and promoting diverse, sustainable food systems.

These Green Gatherings go beyond traditional farmer's markets—they are vibrant celebrations of Zambian food sovereignty.

Farmers and diverse customers exchange knowledge, champion native crops, sign petitions, and learn to create new soil remedies or healthy recipes—strengthening the country's growing organic movement while honouring the land and its people.

uBumi PGS is more than a certification system; it is a practical & transformative solution for strengthening Zambia's organic food systems.

By prioritising collaboration, transparency, and shared learning, uBumi empowers farmers to enhance their practices and build trust with consumers. This approach nurtures a healthier ecosystem while deepening connections between farmers, local markets, and the communities they serve.



PGS farm assessment visit, Lusaka, Zambia
Credit: uBumi PGS

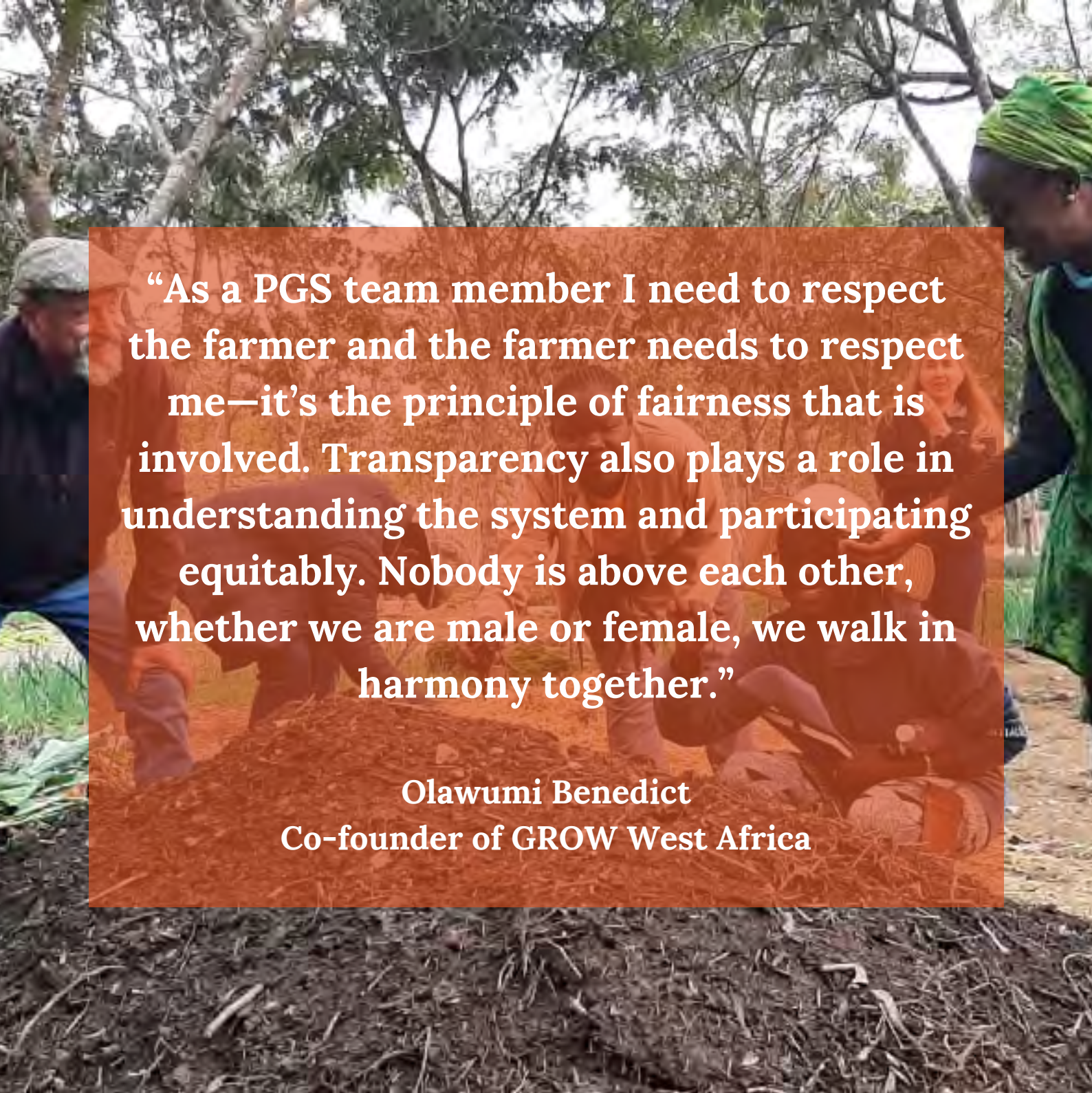
Growing membership and impact

uBumi currently has 8 certified members, with this set to double in 2025 by taking on board new producers and processors. Another 30 informal members have expressed support and interest in the initiative. uBumi PGS Group is committed to expanding its network, supporting new groups to establish themselves, sharing its own experiences in the process. uBumi members are committed to fostering stronger connections, and supporting a resilient organic food system in Zambia.

Learn more about uBumi PGS and how to get involved [here](#).



PGS farm assessment visit, Lusaka, Zambia
Credit: uBumi PGS

A photograph of a group of people, including men and women, working in a field. They are gathered around a large pile of dark, rich soil or compost. In the background, there are several tall, thin trees with green foliage. The scene is outdoors, and the lighting suggests it might be late afternoon or early morning. The overall tone is one of collaborative labor and agriculture.

“As a PGS team member I need to respect the farmer and the farmer needs to respect me—it’s the principle of fairness that is involved. Transparency also plays a role in understanding the system and participating equitably. Nobody is above each other, whether we are male or female, we walk in harmony together.”

Olawumi Benedict
Co-founder of GROW West Africa

NOA PGS, Namibia

From the Ground Up: How Farmers in Namibia Are Growing a New Kind of Organic Movement

In the quiet corners of Namibia's farmlands, something remarkable is taking root. While the world races toward industrial agriculture, Namibia is quietly cultivating a grassroots revolution—led not by large corporations, but by farmers and communities determined to grow food differently.

At the heart of this transformation is a powerful, people-centred tool: Participatory Guarantee Systems, or PGS. It's organic certification, but not as you know it. It's built on trust, local leadership and shared responsibility—and it's redefining how organic farming is recognised, rewarded and respected across the country.

A local system with global roots

Managed by the Namibian Organic Association (NOA), the country's PGS draws on globally recognised standards developed by IFOAM – Organics International. But unlike third-party certification systems, which are often costly, complicated and out of reach for small-scale farmers, PGS is built to be inclusive. It is, quite simply, certification by the people, for the people. Farmers and stakeholders visit each other's farms, assess practices collectively and make decisions together. It's a system rooted in transparency, mutual learning and community accountability.

How the system works

The journey begins when a farmer contacts NOA and expresses interest in becoming certified. From there, the steps are clear and supportive.



“PGS was founded because a group of consumers and farmers wanted this opportunity. It was completely grassroots driven—and I think that's also why it's still here. There's genuine interest in the opportunities PGS offers.”

– PGS team member

- **Start organically**

Farmers begin phasing out synthetic inputs and adopt organic practices aligned with local IFOAM-based standards. They become NOA members, join a WhatsApp group for real-time updates and connect with a growing network of organic growers.

- **Submit assessment forms**

Applicants provide key documents: farm maps, water and soil test results (where applicable), product labels and a risk assessment.

Pre-assessment and review

NOA conducts an online check of the documents. Once everything's in order and the assessment fee is paid, it's time for the farm visit.

- **The farm visit**

Here's where the participatory magic happens. NOA invites all interested members to join the on-site farm inspection. This transparent process is both rigorous and empowering, as peers collectively examine gardens, storage areas, livestock systems and processing zones. They also verify records and ensure compliance with organic standards.

- **Certification decision**

If the farm meets the standard, the farmer receives a certificate and the right to use the NOA organic label. If not, they receive clear guidance and can reapply after improvements.

Certificates last one year, though farmers with strong histories of compliance and low risk may earn a two-year certification—recognising the trust they've built through consistent, transparent practice.

Beyond the label

But this isn't just about stamps and stickers. Namibia's PGS is building a movement. It's creating space for relationships, for ecological learning and for collective resilience. In a country where formal agricultural support is often limited, the peer-to-peer network created by PGS has become a powerful alternative. It offers real-time problem-solving, farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing and a sense of collective purpose.

“Producers are really proud to use the NOA mark. “They know what it means, and they’re proud to explain it to their customers.”

– PGS team member



PGS farm assessment visit, Windhoek, Namibia
Credit: NOA

The market, too, is responding. Although the number of PGS-certified producers remains small, demand is high.

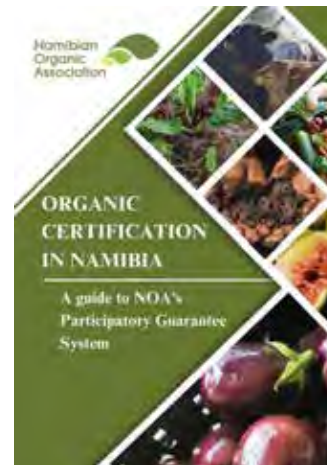
“Supermarkets are keen to stock organic produce. The few producers who are certified don’t struggle to sell—whether directly to customers or through retailers.”

– PGS team member

A story worth supporting

As Namibia faces the growing threats of climate change, land degradation and food insecurity, PGS offers something that’s both grounded and scalable. It proves that certification doesn’t have to be complicated or corporate to be credible. It can be community-driven, values-led and rooted in local realities.

With NOA’s coordination and farmers leading the charge, Namibia’s PGS is quietly sowing seeds of transformation—one farm, one inspection, one organic harvest at a time. For farmers, funders and food lovers alike, this is a story worth watching—and a system worth supporting.



PGS farm assessment visits, Namibia
Credit: NOA



PGS Resources

Find many more PGS resources by registering for free
on the KCOA digital platform.



KCOA

Knowledge Centre for
Organic Agriculture and
Agroecology in Africa

KCOA is a collaborative country-led partnership that aims to scale up the adoption of organic and agroecological farming practices through a network of five Knowledge Hubs in Africa. KCOA partners are based in 18 countries and with the involvement of over 30 civil-society organisations.

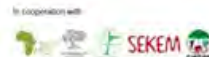
Scan to discover more!



ENGLISH



FRANÇAIS



ISAN MAGAZINE

FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS



[isanmagazine](https://www.facebook.com/isanmagazine)



[isanmagazine](https://www.instagram.com/isanmagazine)



www.isanmag.com (coming soon)